

World Trade Organization (WTO)

The WTO (formerly the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) was established in 1947, and is the international organization that negotiates and enforces trade rules and periodically convenes multilateral trade negotiations. The last completed multilateral trade negotiations, the Uruguay Round, began in 1986 and concluded in 1994. NOAA Fisheries has two broad fishery-related interests in WTO: (1) defending our conservation laws in WTO dispute settlement; and (2) negotiating fisheries tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and subsidies in the trade rounds.

The Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference was held in Doha, Qatar, from November 9-14, 2001. In launching the Doha Round, the Ministers agreed to negotiations on the relationship between existing WTO rules and trade obligations set out in multilateral environmental agreements. The negotiations address how WTO rules are to apply to WTO members that are parties to environmental agreements. Ministers also agreed to clarify and improve WTO rules that apply to fisheries subsidies. The U.S. position has been that WTO Members should eliminate subsidies that lead to overcapacity, overfishing and distort trade. Market access for the fisheries sector is covered in the Non-Agriculture Market Access (NAMA) negotiations. Negotiations stalled in 2011. As of end 2013 no clear work plan had been agreed by Ministers on how and whether to move the Doha agenda forward. The routine work of the WTO including adjudicating trade disputes continues unabated.

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